БАЛКИ
ЛОФТ ПРОЕКТ

МЕЖДУ ЯЗЫКОМ И АБСТРАКЦИЕЙ.

ТЕОРИИ И ПРАКТИКИ АСЕМИЧЕСКОГО ПИСЬМА

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15 АВГУСТА
19.00

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ABOUT ASEMIC WRITING

1. Since the beginning of the 20th century, all over the world, several authors not associated by common paradigms, started to explore new forms of language which are nowadays referred to as "asemic writing". As of the '20s, for example, Henri Michaux (Alphabet, Narration, 1927), one of the milestones of asemic writing,h started to experiment surrealism models which he will never abandon for the rest of his career.

2. For a thorough understanding of asemic writing, we need to move from its underlying concepts and meanings. The general definition of "asemic writing" can be derived from the greek word "a – sema" (asemic), which rather expresses the absence of the sign than the absence of the meaning, a sort of "open" semantic writing without words. However, this is an ambiguous definition, as it misleads the real sense of this a-semantic frame. Hence, it is important to focus, not much on the etymology of the term itself, rather on its profound concept, which results in the impossibility of decoding the sign and its meaning.

The asemantic discourse proposes experiences linked to the graphic representation of forms which recall the language signs, however it does not leave room for semantic interpretation, also because of the absence of syntax and phonetic structures.

One of the main characteristics of the asemic writing is its result in pure aesthetic forms, alluding to a language 'in progress', which can never be decoded in its meaning.

For a better clarification of the definition, we also need to move our analysis from the English term 'writing', indicating on one side the writing itself, on the other hand the 'action' of writing: the process of writing at its early stages, creating itself, however only eventually happening as a graphic event. The term writing, intended as the action of writing, leads to a particular manual skill, to a performing process based on three concepts: first, the gestural process of writing, second, its never becoming semantic language, and third, the voluntariness of the gesture, as far as the signs are not conventional, like letters or codes.

To this regard, asemantic arts are those arts whose representations can be appreciated without reference to any pre-established systems of semantic symbols, differing from figurative arts like poetry and literature' (Asemantico, Treccani).

In anglo-american studies, differently from the Italian context, the term 'asemic' is rather used instead of 'asemantic'. This is because in anglo-american countries 'asemic' is often associated with the term 'asemia', a pathology involving the impossibility to use the language. 'Asemia is a more severe condition than aphasia, so it does have some similarities with the disease. People who have asemia have the inability to comprehend signs, symbols and even language. They also have the inability to use signs, symbols and language. People with asemia sometimes can take up asemic writing, which is 'wordless writing'. What 'wordless writing' could mean is that the writing looks like regular or traditional writing, but there is no content that makes sense. The concept of syntax, semantics or even communication does not exist in asemic writing. (Asemia, Wikipedia).

Hence, the issue of words, being absent in asemantic writing, appears of utmost importance. Considering the absence of whatsoever code and of any semantic meaning, depriving the reader of a key to understanding the language, what is missing is the possibility to determine a set of signifying signs under the definition of 'word'.

Much of the asemic writing develops from ideographic writings, and pictograms, casting, through the movement of writing, a real system of signs, which could seem meaningful, however its outcome ends up in a vague, senseless meaning.

If the reader is not provided with the means to decode any set of graphic signs or symbols, any such set would not be represented to him as 'word'. As a matter of fact, any given language made up of signifying symbols recognised by any given social group, but unknown to the reader, would result asemantic to him however only in appearance, because this set of codes would still maintain its signifying symbols decoded by its original group. From these grounds, the possibility of a relative asemic writing is missing.

3. Starting from the 70s, the asemic writing expanded, spreading throughout the international movements of verbal-visual poetry. Its diffusion in that period found large expression in abstract art, as asemic writing was connected to it as its 'written' element. Only starting from the 90s, asemic writing will reach its autonomous spot.

4. Several authors passed through the complex paths of the language, eventually ending up in asemic practice. Many of those, reached asemic writing even before the definition itself was conceived. Among these authors, we find: Henri Michaux, Raymond Queneau, Bruno Munari, Martino Oberto, Jean Degottex, Pierre Alechinsky, Jean Fautrier, Mark Tobey, Luciano Caruso, Tomaso Binga, Vincenzo Accame, Giulio Paolini, Irma Blank, Mirtha Dermisache, Brion Gysin, Roland Barthes, Cornelis Vleeskens, León Ferrari, Mira Schendel, Betty Danon, Vittore Baroni, Mario Parentela, Jano Barbagallo, Gigi Caldanzano, Fernanda Fedi, Mennitti Paraito, Jeb Acà, Robert Sund, Art&Language, Judit Reigl, John Bennett, Sheila E. Murphy, Luigi Serafini, José Parlà, Demostene Agrafiotis, Bartolomé Ferrando, Francesco S. Dòdaro, Gu Wenda, Made Wianta, Gustavo Vega, Serse Luigetti, Giorgio Moio, Carla Accardi, Sergio Dangelo, Adriano Accattino, Susan Hiller, Isidore Isou.

Among the contemporary authors: Stephen Nelson, Denis Smith, Rafael Gonzalez, Rosaire Appel, Jean-Christophe Giacottino, Anneke Baeten, Arlo Yetes, Jeremy Balius, Bill Bob Beamer, Christopher Skinner, Ekaterina Samigulina, Karen Karnak, Satu Kaikkonen, Joe Herke, Philippe Magnier, Craig Svare, Gabriel Lalonde, Lucinda Sherlock, Kerry Pullo, Pat Bell, Carl Heyward, Cheryl Penn, Lina Stern, Michael Gatonska, Sam Roxas-Chua, Jeannette Cook, Laura Scaringi, Laura Wait, Carles Netto Luis, Miriam Midley, Nancy Burr, Reed Altemus, Sveta Litvak, Andrew Topel, Tim Gaze, Marco Giovenale, and many others.

5. It is possible to analyse the evolution of asemantic writings, by deepening some sociological concepts brought forward by the Canadian sociologist M. McLuhan, who theorized the advend of a post-literary society. He claimed in fact that the continuous evolution of technology would have changed man himself, who would have evolved in 'media literate', 'multimedia literate', 'visually literate', 'trans literate'. As a matter of fact, the mere alphabetisation would have given space to an universal immediate communication founded on the culture of images and sounds. A sort of return to a tribal society, that would have enhanced the culture of image over the verbal one. With the

development of technologies, we experience the passage from a written culture to an verbal one, which is at the same time visual and digital, hence much more dynamic. The founders of the first historical avant-gardes had already introduced in their productions violations of the text, a tendency which will also characterise the future avant-gardes. An example of this trend can be found in the original authorial, gestural and calligraphic writings by E. Villa.

It is apparent that in the verbo-visual poetry, the text is transformed from verbal to visual. With the advent of the a-semantic writing, even more, such passage reaches its extremes enhancing the sole aesthetic value of the sign, and rather loses its aspect of social critique typical of the verbo-visual poetry.

Also the introduction, all over the 20th century, of sound systems and performing equipments, contributes to the affirmation of the visual aspect rather than the verbal one. Writing, in fact, starts being influenced by a type of painting casting signs, gestures (Kline, Matthieu, Hartung) and performances (Pollock, Vedova) including, from the 40s, the free use of the body itself.

Such introductions make the artistic event an individual and personalised one, as far as connected to the same calligraphic sign of the author. Asemic writing, as already uncovered, focuses on the process of the gesture, thus it's characterised as a 'writing in progress', evolving aloud together with the transforming society, by now completely absorbed by the multi-media culture. To this regard, it's useful to ponder on the passing over of the press, which is perceived by McLuhan as a wrapped-up product of events which already occurred, while the TV programmes, originated in the multi-media society, represent 'an instantaneous reply of life'. And if, as he claims, press can be compared to books, which are unchangeable, instead 'news are a marching process' (McLuhan, 1982, p 87).

6. As already anticipated in the introduction, starting from the 20s, H. Michaux reached the edge of the language and produced works which are comparable to asemic writing. Even nowadays Michaux represents a pillar in asemic writing, thanks to a production which on one hand represents one of the first conscious violations of the meaning, on the other hands, provides us with theoretical contributions still used to enquire the principles of the asemic writing.

In the italian introduction of the texts 'Miserabile Miracolo (La Mescalina)' and 'l'Infinito Turbolento (Feltrinelli 1967)' M. Blanchot claims that Michaux refers himself to the infinity as an enemy of mankind and to the 'Mescalina' as a substance refusing the movement of the finite: Infinivertita, Stranquillizza.

Michaux enquiry to document the effects of the Mescalina, brings out the presence of a voluntarity of the sign, that he defines as a vibrating movement, intimate gesture, which from the unconscious moves towards the world.

The consciousness of the gestural movement recalls the upsetting of the Cartesian Cogito theorised by Lacan. The concern in this case is not unfamiliar to the unconscious, which is in continuous dialogue with conscious.

Michaux enhances the poverty of images offered by the use of the Mescalina, as well as the repetition of signs and gestures that the latter implied.